WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 MARCH 1996

# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

Photos courtesy of Charles K. Hyde

The 1891 Bell Road Bridge in Dexter Township is closed and faces a uncertain future. Citizens are working to save it. It is an iron truss design manufactured by the Wrought Iron Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio

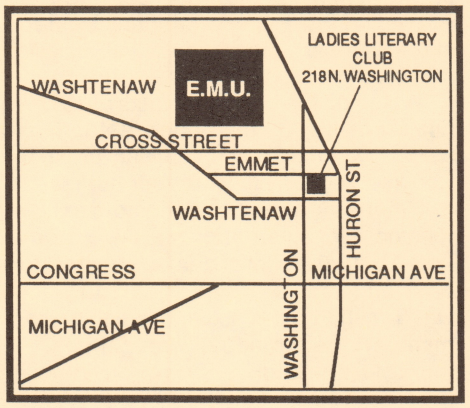
## STORY OF MICHIGAN'S EARLY PLANT NURSERY TO BE TOLD MARCH 17

The story of the first commercial plant nursery in Michigan and the Ezra Lay family who started it will be told at the WCHS meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 17, at the Ladies' Literary Club, 218 North Washington Street, Ypsilanti.

Mary Culver, a historic preservation consultant who earned a master's degree in historic preservation from Eastern Michigan University and has a special interest in Greek Revival architecture, will present the program. The 1834 Greek Revival Lay home is still standing.

Take Washtenaw Avenue east past the water tower to Washington Street, turn left one block to club house at corner of Emmet. From I-94 take exit 183, Huron Street, north through downtown to Washtenaw, turn left one block to Washington, right to Emmet.

Parking on street and usually in nearby church lots.




### KAREN'S COLUMN

## ELECTRICIANS OFFER GIFT WORTH WAITING FOR; KIWANIANS VOLUNTEER TO DO MORE PAINTING

Rob Turner of Turner Electric has taken on the job of installing the electrical wiring at the Museum on Main Street. Rob is coordinating the work which will be performed through the Electrical Union's Apprentice Program.

As yet we have no starting date, however Rob has been busy with our plans, estimating the supplies needed, etc. The materials and labor will be provided at no charge. That's a gift worth waiting for!

Ann Arbor Western Kiwanis again has offered to do some painting for us. You may remember the y painted our fence earlier. Now we hope to put their painting skills to work inside.

I would like to remind you of the signature quilt that the Quilting Section of the Faculty Women's Club made for us as a fund raiser.

I am looking for someone who could take charge of collecting signatures in the remaining blank squares. For a $20 donation you can sign your name on this quilt.

Once the squares are filled, the group will quilt it for us. We will display it in the museum. Please let me know if you could help with this.

Karen O'Neal, 665-2242

## CONGRATULATIONS!

WCHS Vice-President Ina Hanel-Gerdenich and husband Mike are the proud parents of a baby boy. Rudy arrived Saturday March 2.

## CATERED MAY DAY DINNER, VAUDEVILLE AND OTHER OLD TIME LEISURE PASTIMES THEME OF FUND RAISER

An historical catered May Day dinner and an evening of entertainment are planned for the WCHS spring fund raiser Friday, May 3, at Cobblestone Farm Barn.

Professor Woody Register, director of American Studies at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee will present an entertaining program on the history of leisure pastimes in America from the Civil War through World War I.

The Ann Arbor Comic Opera Guild will present a preview of their May 10-11 Vaudeville Show.

Society members are invited to display their attic treasures related to leisure activities of the past, for example an antique bicycle, skates, theater programs, games and sheet music just to name a few.

If you have items to display please call Debbie Hildebrandt, 663-2101 or Patricia Austin, 663-5281. They promise all items will be carefully protected throughout the event.

## *Speakers Needed*

**Laura McNab, WCHS's education coordinator, needs members willing to talk to classes about some aspect of history--local, state or national in which they are interested.**

***Please see coupon on page 5.***

# A NEW WORD IN BRIDGE HISTORY: PRESERVATION

Covered bridges were not covered to provide lover's lanes, although they are convenient. It wasn't so the horses wouldn't get scared crossing the river. The answer is very simple--it's to keep the truss dry.

The worst thing you can do to timber is to let it get wet, then dry, then wet. Timber does much better if it stays wet constantly or stays dry all the time, Professor Charles K. Hyde told the WCHS February audience.

Hyde, a Wayne State University professor of history since 1974, presented a slide show on "Historic Highway Bridges of Michigan." He is the author of a 1993 book of the same title.

He also discussed problems of preserving historic bridges at the meeting in the Washtenaw Intermediate School District Building which was co-sponsored by WCHS and the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission which is working to save the Bell Road Bridge in Dexter Township.

"To understand the history of bridge design we need to focus on two major considerations, first the materials used to build the bridge--timber, stone, iron, steel or reinforced concrete and how the use of those materials has changed over time.

Secondly, the structural form used--the girder or beam, the truss, the arch, various multiple bridge designs and other forms such as suspension bridges.

" The most common type of bridge that was built throughout the 19th century was timber." He showed a small timber bridge near Ellsworth, Michigan and a larger one in Big Rapids dating from 1862. The Big Rapids bridge was appropriately located a stone's throw from various lumber mills," he noted.

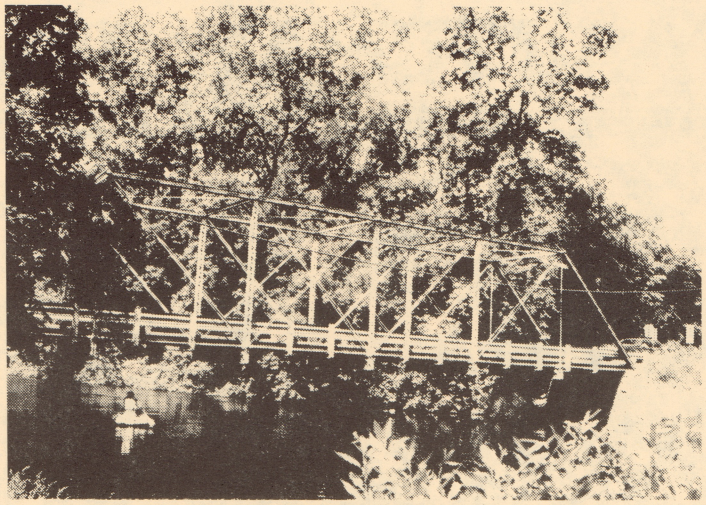
"A sign on the big bridge talks about a $5 fine for driving on the bridge faster than a walk. Of course they are talking about the rule that you should walk your horses, not trot them as a way of keeping down the tensions on these bridges. Also, horseshoes could do a lot of damage to the deck.

"A substantial bridge in Grand Ledge was mostly timber except the thin cross members were made of wrought iron." In the picture, pile drivers were driving piles for a brand new concrete bridge nearby. Later he showed the new concrete bridge.

"We are probably most familiar with timber covered bridges. They have a romantic slot in history and, of course, they were recently given great publicity in 'The Bridges of Madison County,' both the novel and the film.

He showed views of White's Covered Bridge built in 1867 in Kent County near Grand Rapids. A few rotting side panels had been replaced. An interior shot showed the trussing arrangement. "This is actually a through truss bridge done in timber--that is the truss goes overhead as well as being on the sides."

"A curious thing has happened in recent years--bridge engineers have rediscovered the value of timber bridges once again. In rural settings, where we are not talking about interstate highways our own Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) has been an innovator in reintroducing timber bridges."



**The Bell Road Bridge**

He showed a new laminated timber truss bridge which carries M-26 over the river in Eagle River, Michigan on the Keweenaw Peninsula.

## ONLY THREE ORIGINAL COVERED BRIDGES LEFT

"Michigan has only three original covered bridges left, not counting one in Greenfield Village which came from Pennsylvania and Bill Zehnder's reconstruction of a covered bridge up in Frankenmuth.

"At one point, the state with its timber resources had thousands and some of them were enormous. There were covered bridges in Grand Rapids across the Grand River which were as long as 600 feet overall.

"The laminated truss consists of layers and layers of timber laminated with glue. They treat it to protect it from the weather. One of the wonderful advantages of timber bridges is that the salt that we use has no noticeable effect on them. They are not like a steel or concrete bridge that ends up being damaged over time by salt.

"The second type of bridge I want to talk about are metal truss bridges." He showed a pony truss bridge that once stood in Dexter over Mill Creek. There was no structural member crossing over the top of it

"This design is called a bowstring truss because it looks like a bow with the string pulled back. Most of these were fairly small and they have disappeared. There are only a couple left--one is on private property west of Charlotte."

He showed "an enormous one" that had been assembled in Muskegon on land and was about to be moved into place.

"Most of Michigan's iron truss bridges in the 19th century were manufactured out of state, primarily in Ohio although there were some made in other states including Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Michigan produced only a handful of its iron truss bridges.

"The county or town would place an order for a bridge, sometimes after competitive bidding, sometimes not. The bridge would be fabricated in the factory. It would be assembled there, then disassembled for shipping.

"They were connected by pins so you could simply take it apart and ship it up here by rail. Then a local contractor would reassemble it, usually with someone from the bridge company present to tell them what to do and make sure they did it right.

"Usually the local community would have already built the abutments that it was going to rest on. Then they'd have this wonderful chore of moving the darn thing and putting it in place.

"This particular one was about 120 feet in length. People in the picture who are all dressed up are probably the county commissioners out to get their picture taken to show what a wonderful job they did.

"Among the workers are two very dark complected individuals who are either Native American or Black. It's not easy to tell from the original photograph.

"They had to build temporary forms of logs to keep the bridge from tipping in once they got the bridge out half way across. After that it's like a teeter."

He showed a typical surviving rural pony truss bridge. "They are usually fairly narrow and between 40 and 60 feet in length. Then there are some bigger ones."

He showed a larger bridge near Saginaw with ice piled up to the bottom of the bridge. "The story is that an hour after the picture was taken the bridge was swept downstream."

In the next picture a silhouetted human figure is doing a head stand on top of the bridge. "I don't know what that lunatic up there is doing."

"The wrought iron bridges actually are a mixture of wrought iron and cast iron. Wrought iron takes care of the tension forces that the bridge undergoes when a load goes across it. Cast iron holds up to

compression forces.

"Once they went over to steel, around the turn of the century, then the entire bridge was built of steel. Steel was very good for both forces.

"The older iron bridges were pin connected with a bolt and a nut on the end of it. When we get into the 1890s we see a conversion to riveted connections once there were good portable riveting machines developed.

"From the standpoint of historic preservation you are better off if the bridge you are trying to preserve is pin connected because you can sometimes pick up a bridge like this if you have a big enough crane, move it to shore and take the pins out to replace parts that need to be replaced.

"The Bell Road Bridge in Washtenaw County [which citizens are trying to save from demolition] is another Wrought Iron Bridge Company design in a gorgeous rural setting. Every time I see a picture of this bridge there is somebody fishing, riding in a canoe or kayak or rafting in the water below.

"A lot of iron and later steel truss bridges were quite large. One north of Grand Rapids was about 600 feet long. It is no longer with us."

Next he showed some movable bridges. A little swing bridge in New Richmond in Allegan County is on the Kalamazoo River. It swung 90 degrees on a pier and allowed very small boats to pass under it. It would have been hand-cranked.

"Someone would have to get out of the boat and put a big wrench into a turning gear. You could turn it by hand as long as it was well lubricated and well balanced.

"A much larger movable span, no longer with us, was the Sixth Street Bridge in Bay City.

"Most crossings have had several different types of bridges on them at one time or another if they have been used for any length of time.

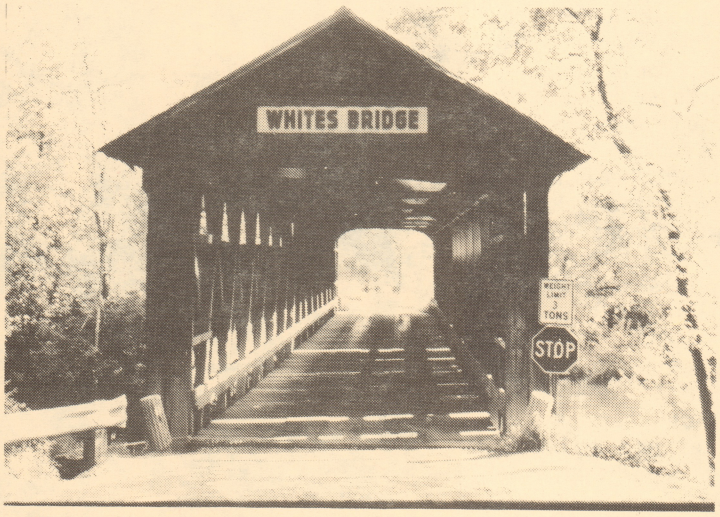
"One case where I could actually trace most of the bridges was on Military Street over the Black River in Port Huron. The first bridge of which we have a photograph was built in 1857 and was a swing bridge. There actually was a small swinging bridge there earlier but there are no photographs of it because it was before the age of photography."

"The 1857 bridge was replaced by an iron swing bridge in 1884. A sign on it said 'You will like Port Huron.' The 1884 bridge stood until 1914 when it was replaced by a draw bridge or bascule bridge.

"The disadvantage of swing bridges is that you have a pier in the middle which ships would run into and it does not allow a very wide space for ships to pass. The 1914 bridge survived until 1991 when it was replaced by yet another bascule bridge."

He showed a view of it with the two 'leafs' in open position.

"These bridges would have very large counterweights so a very small electric motor was all that was needed to turn them. Every time they put down a new layer of pavement on the bridge, the engineers would have to come back and re-set the counterweights to make it easy to operate."



**White's Covered Bridge, 1867, in Kent County near Grand Rapids.**

"The third major type of bridge I want to talk about is reinforced concrete. They came into use in the United States in the 1890s. From 1900 to 1930 they were the most common type of new bridge built in Michigan.

"State and local governments preferred this design because they could build a bridge using local labor and did not have to depend on other-state bridge companies.

"The other-state bridge companies, I should add, developed an elaborate system of price fixing and rigged bidding in the 1880s and '90s. A town would ask for bids. They would get one lower bid and several at a high level. The companies were conspiring so they would all get their share."

He showed two concrete arch bridges in Grand Rapids, one a "filled" type. "In the latter the concrete is probably only six inches thick and the middle is filled with gravel and soil."

Through the arch of a concrete bridge in Grand Ledge you could see the remains of a timber bridge shown earlier.

## RAILROAD WHISTLE CAUSES FAST EXIT

Professor Hyde showed a railroad bridge near Grand Ledge, west of Lansing. "It's called a deck truss bridge because the structural system is all underneath the bridge surface."

"I was out in the middle of this bridge photographing it when I heard a train whistle. That was bad enough but I couldn't tell from which direction it was coming. I hiked off the bridge quickly."

"MDOT in all its wisdom decided several years ago that the bridge was structurally unsound and needed to be replaced. They found out after about a year of demolition that it wasn't unsound and was probably good for another 40-50 years if they had been a little more careful in their analysis."

Professor Hyde found only two concrete through-arch bridges in Michigan, one near Grand Rapids and a second in Adrian.

"A lot of the concrete bridges were beam bridges. The first trunk line bridge built in Michigan with state aid was at Michigamme, west of Ishpeming, in 1914. It's not in use any more.

"There are some elaborate, pretty concrete bridges." He showed one near Petoskey and one in Novi that carried Grand River Avenue over the railroad. Both are no longer with us.

"A design unique to Michigan and Ontario is the so-called camel back bridge which is in fact a girder bridge. I did a survey for the National Park Service some years ago and I sent pictures of these bridges to Washington, D.C.

"They called me up and said what is that. They hadn't seen anything quite like them. They were developed by the first MDOT bridge engineer, C.V. Dewart. You could build them in spans of varying length. The state would provide plans free to county road commissions and local governments.

"At one time there were several hundred camel back bridges in Michigan. I think we are down to only about 25 now.

"Starting in the mid-20th century there have been a variety of steel bridges including suspension and cantilever trusses."

A view of the Blue Water Bridge linking Port Huron and Sarnia, Ontario showed the little railroad station from which Thomas Edison began his trips to Detroit selling newspapers. A Great Lakes ore carrier was passing beneath the bridge.

The International Bridge at Sault Sainte Marie for automobile traffic was completed in 1962.

"The 1935 Mortimer E. Cooley Bridge carries M-55 over the Manistee River in Manistee County. Cooley was a longtime dean of the University of Michigan Engineering School.

"He was so honored because early on he established a sort of co-op program where U-M civil engineers would work for the state highway department summers and even during the year itself on various projects."

The Ambassador Bridge between De-

troit and Windsor, Ontario, com-plected in 1929, and the Mackinac Bridge, which opened in 1957, were shown under construction.

"The Zilwaukee Bridge is not quite historic yet but it will be recognized in the future as a monument to foolishness and cost overruns."

The state of many of Michigan's historic highway bridges was symbolized by a view with signs, 'Road Ends' and 'Bridge Closed.'

"A lot of bridges have, in fact, become so structurally unsound that there's not much that can be done with them. The state highway engineers did some test borings on the West Cross Street Bridge in Ypsilanti to see how much the gravel fill had settled.

"They expected to find the fill maybe six inches or a foot below the level of the bridge. They discovered to their horror there was no fill left. It had washed out through holes in the piers. That with other serious problems made the bridge a real hazard.

"They quickly replaced it. The replacement is a pretty unimaginative standard concrete bridge but, at least, they kept the same configuration with two spans.

"Now I come to the preservation challenge. There are a lot of possibilities for preserving bridges. Highway bridges are one of Michigan's most common historic resources, one of the most common features of the built environment.

"The state has more than 11,000 bridges over 28 feet in length. The best estimate is that about a third of those have some serious structural failing and are not up to carrying the traffic they are asked to carry.

"Historic bridges are threatened for a variety of reasons. Often the volume and weight of traffic increases. Those responsible decide the bridge is going to be replaced in the future and they stop doing preventive maintenance--they do demolition by neglect.

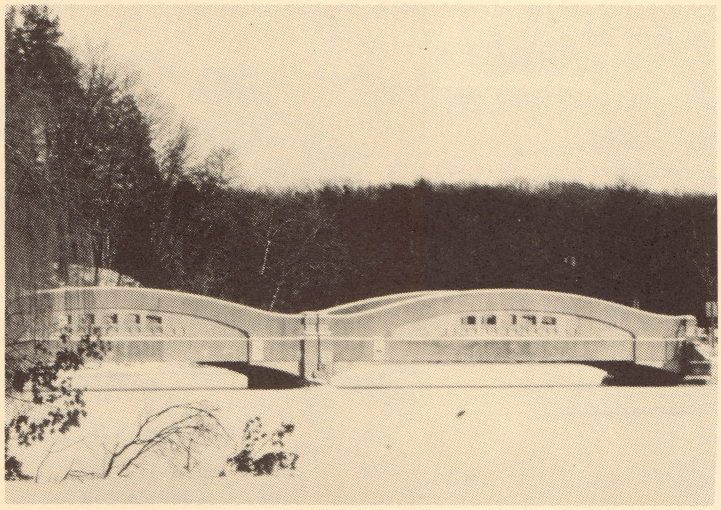
"I think historic bridges are threatened in a general sense because most of the general public views them as purely utilitarian features of the landscape which are disposable. They are viewed as something to use, not something to look at and enjoy.

"Unless you are driving through a truss bridge most people have no sense of what the bridge underneath is like. We pay attention, of course, when we cross any bridge that is too big to ignore, like the Mackinac Bridge.

"Bridges are less likely to have strong preservation-minded supporters or advocates. It is generally easier to find preservationists that want to preserve a school, a church or a city hall. Highway bridges, frankly, are not always pretty structures.

"There has also come into play what I call the highway lobby for want of a better term. There are engineers, consulting engineers and construction contractors who view getting rid of old bridges and building new ones as a way of increasing their revenues and profits.

"They will argue vehemently that the bridge has become dangerous, it's not wide enough, it's not strong enough. The most common argument is the school bus argument-- we can't have a school bus, loaded with our precious children, using this bridge because they are going to end up in the drink. Most of the time that's simply not true.



**Reinforced concrete bridges became popular in the early 20th century. This one crosses the Thornapple River in Kent County.**

"Another argument is that getting a new bridge isn't going to cost much anyway because the federal government is going to pay 70 percent of the cost and we'll get state aid for most of the rest.

"In the end all that money is our own tax dollars. I say not so fast. Under new federal regulations, federal money can be used for rehabilitating old bridges and bringing them up to standard if that is possible.

"The federal government will sometimes pay to move a historic bridge so it can be preserved. The rule of thumb is that it allows as much money to move a bridge as it would have allowed to demolish it.

## CANTON, OHIO FIRM MADE OUR 1876 FOSTER BRIDGE

Professor Hyde showed the Foster or Maple Road Bridge north of Ann Arbor, dating from 1876. It is one of the two oldest iron truss bridges in the state.

"It was made by the Wrought Iron Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio. That company was the most prolific builder of iron truss bridges in Michigan. I've been able to identify about 160 bridges that that company built and I'm sure there were more."

"I would argue that repairing and rehabilitating is usually cheaper than replacing it with a new one. Often more people get jobs by rehabilitation than by new construction. It's more labor intensive.

"There are a wide variety of options that can be adopted to save old bridges and still provide safety. One is to rehabilitate the historic bridge without destroying the historic integrity or fabric. Often this can be done by replacing damaged or worn out structural members with new ones.

"The Fallasburg Covered Bridge in Kent County right now, with the aid of MDOT, has been taken apart and damaged, worn and cracked timber beams were replaced. The bridge is going to be rebuilt and reassembled and will be useful another 50-60 years.

"The Sixth Street Bridge in Grand Rapids, an 1886 truss bridge, was slated for demolition in 1978. It was fabricated by the Massillon Bridge Company of Massillon, Ohio.

"After a real bridge preservation battle, and really the first one involving the state Bureau of History and local groups, this bridge was saved.

"The combination of BOH and local support changed plans to destroy the old bridge and replace it with a six-lane concrete highway bridge which no one in Grand Rapids wanted except the city engineer and some contractors.

"In the first place, businesses on either side of the bridge feared that during new construction they would simply go out of business because there was no way to get to them.

"They restored the bridge by replacing damaged structural members with new. The city engineer decided to paint the restored bridge red even though we provided very clear evidence it had always been gray or black.

"The 1886 Second Street Bridge in Allegan in Allegan County is another preservation victory. It was fabricated by the King Iron Bridge Company of Cleveland. It was restored in 1982.

"They picked up the entire bridge with a crane, moved it to shore, disassembled it and replaced most of the iron structural members with steel, reassembled it and moved it back in place. You would not know it was not the original.

"Today Allegan has an annual civic celebration called Bridgefest, centering around the bridge and the anniversary of when it opened.

"The Bridge Street Bridge in Portland over the Grand River was built in 1890 and restored in 1990. It is a rare example of a non-Ohio bridge. It was built by Groton Bridge and Manufacturing Company of Groton, New York.

"It may not be pure but what they did was smart. They put up good side barriers so that no one would ruin into the bridge in the future. The bridge is now one-way.

"Recently MDOT has rehabilitated two bridges which are very similar--the Mortimer Cooley Bridge in Manistee County and the US-2 Bridge, commonly called the Cut River Bridge, in Mackinac County.

"They did it without destroying the historical

integrity of either bridge and yet addressing the concerns of the Federal Highway Administration on both. The concern was that the lanes were not wide enough.

"With a little bit of ingenuity and common sense, MDOT widened the bridges by cantilevering out from the old edge of the bridge an additional six feet and moved the sidewalks to the new area.

"They saved the old railing and moved that to the outside, then created a new sidewalk on both sides of the bridge and ended up with wide enough lanes.

"They put sidewalks on both sides of the Cut River Bridge because it's such a scenic place with an enormous gorge under it. It has been called 'the million dollar bridge over a five-cent river.'

"At one point the City of Detroit decided they were going to replace the 1923 Belle Isle Bridge. They changed their mind very quickly when they found out it would cost something like $70 million.

"In 1984 they completed an $11 million rehabilitation project. They cut out deteriorated sections of the arches and rebuilt them. They kept the historic light standards and rails.

"The only way they altered the original appearance, and I don't find it objectionable, is they added New Jersey barriers along the side of the sidewalks. Detroiters have had a bad habit of driving off the bridge into the Detroit River either accidentally under the influence of one chemical or another or deliberately. The barriers prevent that.

"Another solution is to use an historic bridge, that perhaps is not adequate for motor vehicle traffic, as a pedestrian or bike path bridge and then replace it at another location. That was done with the US-12 bridge in Mottville in St. Joseph County after there was a lot of public outcry from locals.

""They built a new modern bridge next to the old one which was restored. They've done that increasingly in various parts of the state."

He showed the original 1915 deck truss bridge in Eagle River which used to carry M-26 over a beautiful gorge with the new timber arch replacement next to it. The old narrow bridge is a wonderful perch for tourists to take pictures. The old bridge was preserved in part because much of Eagle River is a historic district.

"Another alternative which most people don't care for but it is certainly better than demolition is to move a historic bridge to a new location. That's fairly easy to do with truss bridges, either timber, iron or steel. Concrete bridges simply do not move.

The 1987 Federal Surface Transportation Act states:

"Congress hereby finds and declares it to be in the national interest to encourage the rehabilitation and reuse and preservation of bridges significant in American history in architecture, engineering and culture.

"Historic bridges are important links to our past, serve as safe and vital transportation routes of the present and can represent a significant resource for the future."

## PANIC STOP SAVES BRIDGE

"The vertical lift bridge connecting Houghton and Hancock in the Upper Peninsula was finished in 1959.

"The story is that the day the bridge was dedicated it was in the down position when a Great Lakes ore carrier approached.

"The ship's captain sounded his horn but the bridge operator could not get the bridge to go up. At that point the captain began to panic, thinking he was going to wreck this brand new bridge.

"He dropped anchor and was able to stop the ship in time but he pulled out all the telephone and electric cables that were in the water."

"What can local historical persons and groups do to preserve bridges?

1. Raise hell and more hell.

2. Enlist the aid of the Michigan Bureau of History at some point. However, the BOH is not going to get involved until they have clear evidence of widespread local concern.

In Grand Rapids people wrote hundreds of letters to local newspapers, had demonstrations on the bridge with picket signs and bake sales to raise money to save the bridge. They got hundreds and hundreds of local people involved.

3. Find your own experts to challenge the so-called expert engineer's recommendations that a bridge is beyond repair.

In the case of the Sixth Street Bridge in Grand Rapids, local people got a structural engineer from the U-M named Robert Darvas. He did his own analysis and presented evidence that the other engineers exaggerated the damage.

Then the BOH could prove that the local money needed to rehabilitate the bridge was going to be a lot less than the local money needed to demolish and build new. The Grand Rapids City Council then voted against the recommendation of their own city engineer.

"I think BOH and MDOT are more willing to build a new bridge in a new location and leave the old standing than to try to rehabilitate the old to carry all traffic.

"It is difficult to take a bridge that may date from the 1870s or '80s and never intended to carry heavy traffic and bring that up to standard to carry trucks and school buses.

4. A lot of what is needed is an educational effort. When you can point out to your county road commissioners what has already been done in other parts of the state by other county road commissions that can sometimes help the cause.

5. If you have an election coming up soon you could threaten to vote against them if they don't vote right. (In Washtenaw County the three county road commissioners are appointed by the County Board of Commissioners.)

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONFERENCE HERE

The 16th annual Preservation Conference, "Good Places to Live and Work, Using Preservation To Make Your Community Stand Out," will be held in Ann Arbor April 19 & 20.

The City of Ann Arbor Historic District Commission and the office of the University of Michigan planner are co-sponsors with the Michigan Historic Preservation Network, the Michigan Historical Center and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

## CERTIFICATES OFFERED

Hand lettered certificates are offered free of charge, framed if desired, by WCHS to organizations, businesses, schools, etc. for milestone anniversaries. Information: 663-8826.

## CLASSROOM SPEAKERS NEEDED

If you would be willing to help by presenting classroom talks about any aspect of local, Michigan or American history please return form to:

**WCHS**
Post Office Box 3336 • Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

***For more information call Laura at 313 / 699-8515***

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: Day: _____ Evening: _____

Topic(s) _____

_____

Preferred Level: ❒ Elementary ❒ Secondary ❒ College

## WCHDC WORKS TO PROTECT THINGS HISTORIC

The Washtenaw County Historic District Commission, which co-sponsored the February WCHS meeting, is discussing establishment of a historic district composed of the three remaining local iron truss bridges in the county, Nancy Snyder, chairman said.

The bridges are Foster or Maple Road Bridge near Barton Hills, East Delhi Road Bridge near Delhi Metropark and Bell Road in Dexter Township, each crossing the Huron River.

The WCHDC is a seven-member body with responsibility to protect historic artifacts and sites in the county. They have established the old one-room Popkins School and Geer School, both on Plymouth Road as historic districts and even a ship's bell kept in the County Planning Commission Building, Ms. Snyder said.

"There are fairly extensive lists of sites we have put historical markers on--cemeteries, old schools, mills, ghost towns--and we are always interested in hearing of places we might not know of.

"We are also sponsoring grants in Ypsilanti to help restore the City Hall facade and in Superior Township to help survey historical resources.

"Our most on-going project is creating an atlas of historical things. We are trying to include everything. It is being compiled in a data base at the county planning office. Ina Hanel, WCHS vice-president is working with this." They hope to transfer the information to maps to educate people of the existence of these things.

Members of WCHDC besides Ms. Snyder are Nancy Asin, Rochelle Balkam, William Delhey, Jean Ledwith King, Donald Riddering and Denis Schmiedeke. The commission meets monthly at 4:30 p.m. the first Thursday in the County Planning Commission office, 110 North Fourth Avenue.

## BELL ROAD BRIDGE SPANS HURON RIVER AT DOVER

The Bell Road Bridge in Dexter Township, which is in danger of demolition is located at what was a little mill hamlet called Dover in the 19th century, according to the 1881 Washtenaw County History.

The 1874 Washtenaw County Atlas shows a drawing of the mill and home of Thomas Birkett who bought the mill in the early 1860s. The township map shows eight houses clustered at Dover in addition to Birkett's home and mill.

Judge Samuel Dexter and Isaac Pomeroy had built a saw mill on the site in 1832. Colonel Daniel Sloan and his brother-in-law Volney Chapin of Ann Arbor bought the power rights and built Dover Mill in 1846.

Birkett, an immigrant from England , worked for Sloan and bought the mill after Sloan died in the early 1860s.

Birkett erected a church nearby at his own expense "open for worship to all believers in God irrespective of color, nationality or creed." A Congregational minister from Webster Township filled the pulpit each Sunday.

The Base Lake Post Office was established at Dover in the 1860s and it was there in 1881 although it had been at Hudson Mills off and on.

The county history says "not much business has ever been done at either place (Dover and Hudson) aside from that directly connected with the mills. They are identified as "flouring mills."

## HOW TO JOIN

Send name, address and phone number with check or money order payable to WCHS Membership, c/o Patty Creal, Treasurer, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336.

Annual dues are individual , $15; couple/family, $25; student or senior,(60+), $10; senior couple (one 60+), $19; business/association, $50; patron, $100. Information: 662-9092.

## AROUND THE COUNTY

**Chelsea Historical Society:** 7:30 p.m. second Monday at Depot, North Main at railroad.

**Dexter Society:** Annual Pioneer Craft Fair, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 16, in Dexter High School gym. More than 50 crafts. Lunch served 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Fay Knapp was recently elected president of the Society.

**Manchester Society:** 7:30 p.m. third Tuesday at Blacksmith Shop, 324 East Main.

**Milan Society:** 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street. Programs feature local talent and businesses.

**Salem Society:** 7:30 p.m. fourth Thursday at Township Hall.

**Saline Society:** 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Depot Museum, 402 N. Ann Arbor St. Speaker Peggy Haines, Washtenaw County Clerk, "Searching Records."

**Webster Society:** 7:45 p.m. second Monday. March 11 at home of Dan and Linda Chapman, 3430 North Zeeb Road, Dexter. Elmer & Annie Wessel will give a program about their visits to all the county courthouses in Michigan.

April 8, at home of Don & Margaret Zeeb, 3300 West Joy Road, Ann Arbor. Program: "Remembering Boyden Plains" by the hosts and others.

**Ypsilanti Society:** Museum, 220 North Huron Street, open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays & Sundays.

## APRIL TOPIC TOLD

Dr. Margaret Steneck, University of Michigan history teacher, will talk about the lives and activities of U-M faculty wives in the mid-19th century at the April 21 WCHS meeting.

## ARTIFACTS TO DONATE?

Anyone wishing to donate an artifact to WCHS should contact Judy Chrisman, collections chair, at 769-7859 or by mail, 1809 Dexter Ave., Ann Arbor, MI 48103.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**WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336


**WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**STATE'S FIRST PLANT NURSERY**

**2:00 P.M. • SUNDAY MARCH 17, 1996**

**LADIES' LITERARY CLUB**

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